

# DIGITAL IMAGING AND PHOTOGRAPHY

SUNDAY, 21 FEBRUARY 2010

## Culture and Communication

A little note on communication: All designers are concerned with communication. Designers use a variety of visual languages that have their own codes and conventions to express ideas. These ideas can be expressed both/either consciously and/or unconsciously. John Fiske has stated that there 'are broadly two types of definition of communication. The first sees it as a process by which A sends a message to B upon whom it has an effect. The second sees it as a negotiation and exchange of meaning in which messages, peoples-in-cultures and 'reality' interact so as to enable meaning to occur' (O'Sullivan, 1994, p. 50).

I have in previous posts discussed the Internet and the World Wide Web as communication tools and as social condensers. From Soviet constructivist theory, the social condenser is a spatial idea practiced in architecture. Central to the idea of the social condenser is the premise that architecture has the ability to influence social behaviour (as discussed in Shock of the New episode 4, "Trouble in Utopia"). It may be argued that the 'architecture' of the WWW, a 'public space', breaks down perceived social hierarchies and creates an environment that allows and encourages disparate groups and communities to interact. We can explore how real and virtual communities formed and sustained. In 1997 Microsoft set up a project: 'MSN Street' in which the residents of a North London road were given computers and free access to the Internet.

These communication technologies can impact on communities in many different ways. In the rural Western Isles of Scotland, this communication technology is used to keep traditional communities together. It also helps to develop new communities: today we may think of My Space or Second Life amongst many others.

Tom Standage the author of *The Victorian Internet* (1998), points to the features common to both the telegraph networks of the 19th Century and today's Internet (Standage was on the reading list for Week one of Media Technologies and Public spheres). He compares them both in terms of the speed of communication, their commercial possibilities, the utopian notion of connectivity and the transcendence of national and political boundaries. These viewpoints are not too dissimilar to Marshall McLuhan's (1911-80) claim that the new electronic media would restore our sense of community and collectivity creating what he called a 'global village'.

However communication is not simply about information, surely? Is it not

about social grooming and our increasing ability to talk might not have been (or should that be just been?) about helping one another understand the world, but a guard against lying.

Further reading:

Bell, David J. [et al.], Cyberculture: the key concepts London: Routledge, 2004 303.4834 bel

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Preece, Jenny, Online communities: designing usability, supporting sociability New York: Wiley, 2000 e

Spender, Dale Nattering on the net: women, power and cyberspace North Melbourne: Spinifex, 1995

Websites:

Tom Standage's Home Page: [www.tomstandage.com](http://www.tomstandage.com)

POSTED BY JOHN HUDSON AT 16:11 

LABELS: CYBERSPACE, DIGITAL, HISTORY, MEDIA TECHNOLOGIES AND PUBLIC SPHERES, NEW MEDIA, RESEARCH, THEORY, WEB 2.0